

conservation projects:

West Coast National Park

SA Wingshooters linked up with the West Coast National Park to help monitor and protect the migratory birds at Langebaan lagoon – a wetland of international importance... This project is undertaken in support of the 'Wings-Over-Wetlands' programme of UNEP in partnership with Wetlands International, Ramsar and others. Wings-Over-Wetlands is the largest global initiative to date for the conservation of migratory waterbirds...



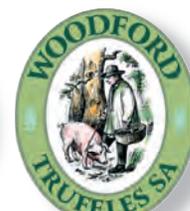
The SA Wingshooters Association has donated 12 high-powered binoculars to the rangers of the West Coast National Park. These were handed over at the inauguration of the new Preekstoel Information Centre in the Park on 5th August by sponsors Marc Ager of Ramrod Products and Volker Miros of Woodford Truffles SA, both members of SA Wingshooters.

The project was initiated by Dr Dave Longland of the honorary rangers of the Park and supports the international Wings-Over-Wetland project, which is the largest initiative

to date in the Africa-Eurasian region for the conservation of migratory waterbirds and the sites on which they depend. The project is a joint venture of the United Nations Environment Programme, Wetlands International, the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and a range of donors and local partners.

The West Coast National Park is rightly regarded as one of the world's conservation jewels. In 1988 the Langebaan lagoon, which is the heart of the Park, was included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance

WINGS OVER WETLANDS



Ramrod Manufacturing

by Ramsar, to which 160 countries subscribe. The salt marsh plants and semi-aquatic plants of this amazing natural area is a rich habitat for some 255 species of birds, including more than 50,000 birds in the summer months, migrating from as far as Siberia and Greenland to Langebaan. In winter, there are some 10,000 waterbirds including some 4,500 flamingoes. The coastal strandveld of Langebaan is home to the core population in South Africa of the vulnerable black harrier, *Circus maurus*.

The flyway approach to conservation of the Wings-Over-Wetlands addresses the ecological needs of migratory birds throughout their life cycles and the networks of sites on which they depend. A migratory bird's flyway encompasses its entire range, including the breeding and non-breeding areas and the resting and feeding sites in between, as well as the area within which it migrates.

Changes at one site in this chain can influence the bird population as a whole, the impacts of which may be felt at other sites far away. The strategy therefore requires that all key sites along a bird's flyway are in good condition and are able to carry out their functional role in the bird's migratory cycle or pattern of nomadic movements. The need to conserve and manage all critical sites on a given migratory pathway is now widely recognised as an important component of flyway conservation.

An essential component of the flyway approach is that the networks of critical sites for birds are supported by networks of people engaged in the conservation of these sites, such as the Management and the Honorary Rangers of the West Coast National Park.

“The participation of SA Wingshooters is the result of the intimate involvement of our members in remote natural areas and especially wetlands and waterways where few people venture, and our absolute commitment to the conservation of gamebirds and waterfowl,” said Dr Raoul van der Westhuizen, chairman of SA Wingshooters. “We have a role to play in the conservation of our wetlands and migratory waterbirds and we are grateful to the Parks’ management and to Dr Longland for the opportunity to play a small part in this programme.”

The marine life of the Park has more than 400 species of invertebrates. Before the conservationists put a stop to it, some 800,000 sand prawns were harvested in the Langebaan mud flats each year! South Africa’s most endangered marine mollusc, *Siphonaria compressa*, does not occur anywhere else in the world but here. The molluscs are a rich source of food for migrant waders such as the curlew sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*).

The islands support significant breeding colonies of rare and endangered seabirds, including Cape gannets, African penguins, bank cormorants, Cape cormorants and oystercatchers.

It is not surprising that the rich natural resources of Saldanha and Langebaan was a draw card in historic times for explorers, adventurers, pirates, opportunists, poachers, whalers, guano collectors, penguin egg harvesters, oyster harvesters and more recently bait diggers and crayfish catchers.

And so it remains to this day.

The conservation integrity of the West Coast National Park is compromised by several threats and constraints. These include lack of scientific information, lack of funds (inappropriate roads and infrastructure), ore and oil terminal harbour and shipping activities, military activities and lack of respect of park rules and boundaries, commercial



fishing activities, boating activities, recreational bait digging and fishing activities, alien vegetation, tourism and activities by other landowners, and demand for ground water.

Above all, the extrovert nature of the Park and the ease of controlled and uncontrolled access to the Park, together with increased tourism, make special demands on management and

the protection of endangered and sensitive wildlife and biosystems.

“The donation of 12 binoculars for the rangers of the Park by the SA Wingshooters Association, is another modest step in the programme to ensure the integrity of one of the world’s great paleontological, archeological and natural heritage sites,” Dr Van der Westhuizen said. Δ